



Mission Paradox: Pulled In Two Directions

Doing the Helpful Thing < > Doing the Enforcement Thing: A Case for Police Loss of Commitment

Decades ago, when police stress first became a subject of study, several key factors were identified that made police stress different from the stress experienced by people in most other occupations. One stressor became known as "burst stress"—based on the fact that officers go from periods of relative inactivity to periods of high alert in sudden bursts. This was sometimes referred to as a "police paradox," because the sudden "safe" then "unsafe" extremes of the job combined to produce the symptoms related to stress.

More recently, because of the public need for a more socially involved po-

lice force, another "paradox-stress" has developed. Today, police not only go from safety to danger without warning, but with the advent of community policing, they are now expected to go from being a friendly problem-solver, in one case, to being a safety conscious law enforcer in another. It's sometimes hard for people outside of police work to imagine, but this creates a sort of "mission paradox"—a disease of "over" commitment or trying to be all things in all situations, constantly being pulled in two directions, with *danger* being an ever-present possibility.

The irony of mission paradox is that the resulting stress it creates ultimately depletes a police officer's sense of commitment, and often resembles full-blown cynicism. The effects of this stress are usually delayed, most closely resembling the symptoms of burnout, and are sometimes referred to as a cumulative stress reaction. The symptoms seem to appear "out of the blue," because supervisors and fellow officers often miss the early warning signs. Officers suffering from this syndrome are commonly characterized by apathy, paranoia, blaming others for their problems, temper flare-ups, over-reacting to minor incidents, and excessive use of force.

Getting The Job Done < > Taking Care of Your People: A Case for Supervisor Loss of Commitment

Police middle managers and supervisors also experience mission paradox, but for slightly different reasons. For sergeants, stress comes from all sides. From seemingly inflexible superiors demanding the sergeant get the job done, and from seemingly unforgiving subordinates who expect the sergeant to support their interests and welfare. The U.S. Army's Leadership

and Command program describes the paradox this way:

"A leader's job is to meet the expectations of the organization while meeting the needs of the individuals in the unit. Frequently, we may find ourselves in situations where it seems nearly impossible to do both at the same time."

Stuck in the "middle," sergeants feel

a pervasive lack of control over their work. Constantly being forced to take sides, it is easy for a sergeant to lose commitment to the profession. FTO's (Field Training Officers) may experience as much or even more paradox-stress than a sergeant, carrying the burden of being a role model and mentor on one hand, and an evaluator and judge on the other.

You're Either With Us < > Or You're Against Us: A Case for Female, Minority, and Family Loss of Commitment

Female and minority officers often experience a unique type of paradox-stress. Females must deal with gender stereotypes held by many male officers, yet they also feel a need to gain acceptance from them because of the need for teamwork and reli-

ance on one another in the police profession. Likewise, minority officers must deal with the prejudicial attitudes of some officers they work with, endure bigotry from some of the very people they are sworn to protect, and occasionally tolerate their

own minority group's animosity for police (a triple whammy effect).

The families of police officers vicariously suffer paradox-stress. Children of police officers want to be accepted into the normal peer groups on one hand,

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but feel obligated to hold themselves to a higher standard of conduct on the other. Spouses are often at odds in figuring out how to communicate with non-police families for the same reason. Both spouses and children must deflect an endless stream of questions and opinions from neighbors, friends, and even relatives, whenever the police are in the media spotlight.

Examples of Mission Paradox

One example of “mission paradox” can be seen developing with NATO peacekeeping forces and UN police officers that are currently assigned to Kosovo. Initially, they protected ethnic Albanians from Serbian and Yugoslav forces. But now that Albanians are moving back into Kosovo, the UN and NATO find themselves protecting native Yugoslavs against revenge-seeking Albanians.

Because of their dual-edged mission, NATO and UN forces are now resented and attacked by Albanians who one year ago were glad to see them. As a result of this seemingly no-win situation, compounded by poor equipment and understaffing, many UN police officers report they are stressed-out, have had enough, and want out of Kosovo. The mission paradox is obvious: Who’s the good guy and who’s the bad guy? It’s a question that Vietnam Veterans can appreciate, as well as police officers. When everyone needs to be approached as having the potential to be a friend or foe, the paradox is multiplied and so is the possibility for developing a stress syndrome.

The book, *Saving Private Ryan*, by Max Collins, is more detailed than the movie and well dramatizes the effects of paradox-stress. The unit was moving into the French village of Neuville, when they encountered a bombed-out house holding a mother and father with two children. The parents wanted the GIs to take their children to safety, and the GI named Carparzo said “Let’s do the decent thing.” While arguing his case, Caparzo was struck down by a sniper’s bullet.

Like many police officers who have been left angry and frustrated, one



way or another, after trying to do the right thing, Caparzo’s captain bitterly vowed never to help refugee children again, as if it was the bystander’s fault Caparzo died. He said: “And that is why we don’t baby-sit.” One of the other GIs blames Caparzo’s death on Private Ryan, whom they were en-route to save: “Caparzo’s just the first of us to pay for Private Ryan’s ticket home,” said Reiben. The GI named Jackson tried to bring everyone back to their senses by telling them: “Private Ryan didn’t kill Caparzo, a German sniper did.”

In the psychology of emotional survival, people will try to explain disturbing experiences the best they can. However, when an individual is under stress and being pulled in different directions, an association between two unrelated emotional events can be mistakenly made. That is why, with the stress of Caparzo’s death, the Captain blamed the children who he was focusing on, and Reiben blamed Private Ryan who he had been complaining about all day. But the sniper was going to be there no matter what, and at that moment he could have taken-

out any of the GIs—it just so happened he shot Caparzo who was at that minute arguing to do the decent thing.

Because of the way the incident turned out, however, the Captain and many of the GIs rationalized that helping others was somehow a dangerous thing to do, and that the only way to be safe is to take a harsh attitude toward everything and everybody. A perceived lack of control in a stressful situation is one of the most difficult experiences for a person to deal with. When police officers experience this lack of control from a critical incident, they often cope by attributing the event to something over which they do have control, even if the connection isn’t rational. Why would officers fool themselves so? Because rationalizing helps return a sense of self-control over one’s safety and destiny, all be it unfounded.

Police need to understand that with mission paradox—being pulled in two directions at the same time—it is easy to confuse the “cause and effect” of the different undertakings or intents. As a result, what we consider to be

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strong and weak, or good and evil, could become unclear. While police do this in a variety of circumstances, it is most obvious after an officer has been killed on duty. Friends of the deceased officer, even if they were not present at the incident, begin to associate whatever they were doing around that time as somehow related to the event, and erroneously think: "If I hadn't done *this*, then *this* would not have happened." Reversely, as in the case of Caparzo in *Saving Private Ryan*, police will find ways to blame another officer's bad-luck on something he happened to be doing at the time, even if it had no direct connection: "It's his

own fault. If he hadn't been doing *that*, then *that* wouldn't have happened to him." Unfortunately, this kind of association and rationalizing is how bad habits and bad attitudes develop.

Advice and Counsel

Understanding how stress works is one of the best inoculations toward controlling its effects. Know that stress reactions vary by characteristics of your personality, social support structure, life experiences, years of service, level of education, use of coping strategies, the intensity of the stressful event, and any unique features of the organization. The Michigan State Police



Office of Behavioral Science would like to help you cope with stress more effectively. For more information, call Dr. Gary Kaufmann, 517-334-7745, Dr. Richard Smith, 517-334-7747, or Dr. Robert Wolford, 517-334-7028; the toll-free number is 888-677-2999. 📞

TEAMWORK



WHY TEAMS SUCCEED

- ✓ A clear set of objectives, spelled out unambiguously by management.
- ✓ Metrics allowing team members to assess their performance—and showing the connection between the team's work and bigger organizational goals.
- ✓ Ongoing training—not a one shot deal—in communication, group leadership, and other team skills.
- ✓ Free decision-making authority over how to reach their goals, as long as it is moral, ethical, legal, and within the budget.
- ✓ Rewards and recognition are team-based—no individual incentives.
- ✓ An open culture, with easy access to team-specific information and to senior management.

Source: Harvard Management Update, January 2000

WHY TEAMS FAIL

- ✓ No long term objectives—not looking a year out and watching the big picture.
- ✓ Not allowing group members a voice in the decision-making—a failure to build consensus within the team.
- ✓ Team members that fail to hold one another accountable for the performance of the whole group.
- ✓ Bosses that boss—"constantly" controlling how "everything" is done.
- ✓ Lack of support from the bigger organization.
- ✓ Managers that stay in the office and never work on the team to see how things are really done.
- ✓ Turf competition or power hoarding special interests within the organization.

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The Tuebor is now accessible, with Adobe Acrobat Reader, through the Michigan State Police Training Division Intranet site, or via the Internet at www.msp.state.mi.us/division/academy



MANDELA SPEAKS

The War on Drugs

Nelson Mandela was the first democratically elected State President of South Africa, serving from May 1994 until June 1999. This achievement was the culmination of his fight against Apartheid — a struggle that required him to sacrifice much of his adult life to incarceration for his political beliefs.

One would expect that, after being treated so unjustly, Mandela would be bitter and seek revenge against his old oppressors, especially after he ascended to a position of power. But to the contrary, Mandela sponsored a campaign to air old grievances and bring forgiveness to his country so that it could move forward rather than be torn apart by old hatreds.

Mandela's philosophy has always been to focus on problems that are current, and he has always been willing to sacrifice his safety for the cause. After becoming president, for example, Mandela found it necessary to confront a hostile organized crime and drug trafficking mafia in South Africa. The following excerpts from Mandela's speeches reflect his policy on the problem. It is a timely message for U.S. law enforcement who continue to struggle, not only to stop drug trafficking, but also to educate the public on the need for drug laws and prevention programs.

Drug trafficking has escalated to such an extent that it can be seen as the new universal threat to all societies. It is bad enough that so many individuals are destroyed by drug-abuse. The real enemy is the drug merchant. The people involved in the illicit drug trade — from members or organized crime groups to casual dealers — have

little respect for our laws or the lives of our people. In some countries the drug barons and warlords engage in terrible deeds — judges are killed, bribed or terrorized, and police buildings are bombed.

In recent years we have found that the potentially huge profits of drug trafficking are encouraging an increasing number of criminals involved in more orthodox crimes, such as robbery and extortion, to extend their activities to the drug trade on a national and international scale. The extent of their activities can lead to a real threat to the ability of a government to assert its authority and maintain peace and security.

South Africa has in recent years passed legislation with stringent penalties and other deterrent measures to deal with the problem...On the one hand we must continue to mount tough action against the criminals. This means effective implementation of the tighter laws and bail conditions; a more effective police force whose investigative capacity continues improving by the day thanks to the detective academy government has established, and improved co-operation between all criminal-justice agencies. Those who commit crime must know they will be caught and punished.

On the other hand we must attend with equal vigor to assisting the victims of crime; to preventing crime; and to eradicating the underlying social causes of crime such as poverty and inequality...and we need to ask ourselves: are the measures sufficient? Do they need to be reviewed? This problem applies as much to the ad-

ministration of justice as it does to effective and legitimate policing. It applies even more, with regard to the need to implement social and economic programs to remove the social foundation of this scourge.

For all these reasons...when it comes to crime prevention, few initiatives can have more significance than the one we are launching. It takes us beyond the mere pointing of fingers, to a partnership for practical action to tackle issues that contribute to crime. It has grown out of an inspiring initiative by men and women who have now succeeded in involving government, business, religious bodies, youth and cultural organizations as well as our international friends. It is aimed at breaking the cycle of crime at its most critical point, amongst our youth, inside and outside prison. And it takes the fight against crime to the grass roots.

By combining education and crime prevention, by working in our schools and amongst young people who are unemployed or in prison, the campaign will indeed bring the light of hope to help break the darkness that feeds the ranks of the criminals. It will, we believe, add strength to our efforts to change the culture of violence that pervades our society, particularly in many of the schools and homes where our young people learn the values that guide them.

The demands and challenges are great. But so will be the results if we work together. ■

The Four Freedoms

On Jan. 6, 1941, in a message to Congress, President Franklin D. Roosevelt stated that there were “four freedoms of common humanity” that should prevail throughout the world: freedom of speech and expression, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear. These freedoms became a rallying point during World War II and, as his personal contribution, Norman Rockwell painted the famous “Four Freedoms” posters, symbolizing these democratic principles.

Thomas Jefferson, as much as any of the Founding Fathers, expressed with eloquence the basic principles of our democracy and the four freedoms, leading Senator Elbert D. Thomas (a former University of Michigan professor) to state in 1942: “Democracy, with Jefferson’s four freedoms, is essential...a man must enjoy at least four freedoms to be in any true sense a man.”

The Four Freedoms are embodied in the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution, and in the struggle for law and order, police officers should keep in mind that these are the principles they are endeavoring to preserve, protect, and defend.

Freedom of Worship

Jefferson’s concept of free worship encompassed learning and thinking, as much as religion. If religion is not free, then it becomes a device for those in power to control the minds of the populace. If learning is not free, it becomes difficult to find the truth, which is religion. Jefferson believed that only an enlightened person, or free thinker, could govern himself, or others. Jefferson wrote: “Almighty God hath created the mind free, and manifested His supreme will that free it shall remain by making it altogether insusceptible of restraint...all attempts to influence it by temporal punishments or burthens, or by civil incapacitations, tend only to beget habits of hypocrisy and meanness.”

Freedom of Speech and Expression

In Jefferson’s day, “the King could do no wrong,” and it was dangerous to even discuss ideas that could be construed as contrary to the elite power

holders. However, Jefferson held a deep-seated conviction that leaders were needed, not to control people, but to help people lead themselves. Freedom of speech and expression is needed if people are to be socially responsible members of society. Thus, open discussion should be encouraged. To Jefferson, man’s problems were not insurmountable parts of his nature to be controlled by force—they were obstacles, but they could be overcome by a freedom loving people: “That government is best which governs least, because its people discipline themselves.”

Freedom from Want

“The pursuit of Happiness” being a primary goal of all people, Jefferson realized that economic success was possible only if people were free to envision their own future. Given a chance and a little opportunity, man can overcome and achieve almost anything. Jefferson put it succinctly when he said, “Every man wishes to pursue his occupation and to enjoy the fruits of his labours and the produce of his property in peace and safety...When these things are accomplished, all the objects for which government ought to be established are answered.”

Freedom from Fear

Passion for life is a precious treasure. Fearful people have little capacity for it. The public’s safety and welfare is

government’s primary reason for existing—police being one of the most important protectors. It is only by the courage to take action in the face of greed, violence, and prejudice that the true American values of equality, life, liberty and happiness can be preserved. Says Jefferson: “The purpose of government is to maintain a society which secures to every member the inherent and inalienable rights of man, and promotes the safety and happiness of its people. Protecting these rights from violation, therefore, is its primary obligation.”

Of course, life has never been as simple and safe as depicted in Rockwell’s paintings of the Four Freedoms, especially not during the 20th century. The fact is that Norman Rockwell painted through periods of war, depression, mass genocide, terrorism, torture, famine, race riots, lynchings and assassinations. Like Jefferson, he didn’t live in a better world, he only hoped for a better world, faithfully believing in the possibility. It was with this same sense of optimism and idealism that police inscribed, at the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial in Washington, D.C., the following statement: **“IN VALOR THERE IS HOPE.”**

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National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial

Preserve, Protect & Defend THE FOUR FREEDOMS



Freedom from Fear



Freedom from Want



Freedom of Speech



Freedom to Worship

It is by understanding his rights that man learns his duties—for where the rights of men are equal, every man must finally see the necessity of protecting the rights of others.

- Thomas Paine, *Dissertations on First Principles of Government*, July 1795